

# The Confessor's Tongue for September 25, A. D. 2022

15<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost; St. Sergius of Radonezh

In honor of St. Maximus the Confessor, whose tongue and right hand were cut off in an attempt by compromising authorities to silence his uncompromising confession of Christ's full humanity & divinity.

## September 25: St. Sergius of Radonezh

A saint does not shine outwardly. All of his riches are within, in his soul. A peasant came from afar to the monastery to see St. Sergius. When he asked the monks for the abbot, they told him he was working in the garden. The peasant went to the garden, and there saw a man in poor, ragged clothes, digging like any other peasant on a farm. The peasant returned to the monastery dissatisfied, thinking that the monks had made fun of him. So, to make things clear, he asked again for the glorious holy father, Sergius. Just then, Sergius returned to the monastery, and welcomed the peasant, serving him at the table. The saint saw into the heart of his guest, and knew the low opinion he had of his appearance. He consoled him by promising that he would see Sergius in a little while. A prince and his boyars then arrived at the monastery, and they all bowed low to St. Sergius, and asked his blessing. The monks then removed the peasant from the room in order to make room for the new guests. In amazement the peasant looked on from a distance, to see that the one he had sought had been nearby all the time. The peasant rebuked himself for his ignorance, and was greatly ashamed. When the prince departed, the peasant quickly approached the saint, fell at his feet and began to beg his forgiveness. The great saint embraced him and said to him: "Do not grieve, my son, for you are the only one who knew the truth about me, considering me to be nothing—while others were deluded, taking me for something great."

## The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great 33

*Abba Anthony also said, "Always have the fear of God before your eyes. Remember Him who gives death and life. Hate the world and all that is in it. Hate all peace that comes from the flesh. Renounce this life, so that you may be alive to God. Remember what you have promised God, for it will be required of you on the day of judgment. Suffer hunger, thirst, nakedness, be watchful and sorrowful; weep and groan in your heart; test yourselves, to see if you are worthy of God; despise the flesh, so that you may preserve your souls."*  
Saying 33 *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

*Commentary:* These are hard words from St. Anthony, but they are merely a compilation of our Savior's "hard" admonitions to watch, to be blessed by hungering and thirsting now, to be worthy of him by "hating" family members, and to seek first the kingdom of God and not gain the world and lose our souls. "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple," (Luke 14:26).

St. John the Theologian speaks in a similar vein in his first epistle: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If many man love the

world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever. I John 2:15-17

"Always have the fear of God before your eyes." The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Without that sober fear of him who has power over life and death, we will lack wisdom and will live foolishly and self-destructively.

"Hate the world." If we understand the world as the fallen order of man described by St. John's words, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," it is clear why we are to hate those things collectively described as "the world." Yet the words cut deeper. St. Maximus writes, "If we sincerely love God, we cast out the passions by this very love. Love for Him means to prefer Him to the world, and the soul to the body. It means to despise worldly things and to devote oneself continually to Him through self-mastery, love, prayer, psalmody, and so forth" (*400 Chapters on Love*, 3.50). Even the good natural order, the material world God made, which He declared to be "very good", can get in the way of loving God. If we prefer our material life and all its pleasures and cares to knowing and serving God, we are no better than idolaters, for we are worshipping and serving the created things rather than the Creator. Because of God's surpassing goodness, to give preference to material things over Him is like filling our pockets with common gravel when we could have easily filled them with diamonds. Seeing how easily distracted from God we are by the good world, St. Anthony expresses our proper attitude towards the world in contrast with our attitude towards God.

"Renounce this life..." and "Remember what you have promised God..." speak first of the monastic life which begins with renunciation of the world and its usual way of life and a promise of devoting oneself wholeheartedly to God. For those of us who live in the world, we must remember our Baptism, our consecration of ourselves to God and what that requires of us and be constantly renewed in it, and not let ourselves be dominated by earthly values (such as the 'American Dream').

Anthony's admonitions to suffer hunger, thirst, nakedness, to be watchful and sorrowful is a call to the ascetic Christian life: to prayer, to fasting, to almsgiving and to repentance. His word to "despise the flesh" means we are to war against the passions the seek to rule us, that we are to subject our bodies to our minds illumined by Christ and not to let our bodies run our lives.

This word is hard for us to hear, but that does not mean we should not hear it. We enter into the Final

Judgment in this life as we allow the Holy Spirit through the commands of Christ to judge our lives, as we accuse ourselves before God in Confession of our failure to love Him with all our heart. Without such hard words, we tend to live in self-satisfied complacency, which deposits us directly on the highway to hell. Made God grant us all "ears to hear" and the courage to face God's judgment of our lives now rather than later. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

### The Commandments of Christ

"If ye love Me, keep My commandments."

*These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world. John 16:33*

Unless we isolate ourselves from the news, public schools, politics, and popular entertainment, or are perpetual optimists seeing only the best in life, we quickly find there is little natural reason to be of "good cheer" in this life. Wars, terrorism, political rivalries and hatreds, lies, public outrage, scandal, the dissolution of traditional culture and the family, homes broken by divorce, drugs, abortion, poverty, and the growing rebellion against God's created order all work to give cause for gloom and despair to those who focus on them.

But despite all this, Christ commands his apostles and us "to be of good cheer". We probably do not think of this command—"be of good cheer"—when we think of Christ's commands, but here it is for us to consider how we may carry it out to God's glory. If we think of the merriment of Christmas and the unquenchable good cheer of Scrooge's nephew Fred in *A Christmas Carol*, we have a good image of what "good cheer" looks like. The verb also has the sense of having "good courage" and "being confident."

Christ contrasts for us what we have in Him and what we have in the world. In Him, we have peace; but in the world, we have tribulation. Tribulation, *thlipsis*, comes from a verb that literally means "to press, squash, hem in". Figuratively, it means "to oppress, to harass, to afflict." Hence the noun means tribulation, affliction, oppression, the state of being pressed or squashed, even unto death.

This word of Christ sets our expectations for life. In Him, and in Him only, shall we find peace. He spoke the preceding words in the Upper Room Discourse (John 13-16) to His disciples troubled that he would go away that they might have peace. In contrast, in the world, he promises them tribulation. It is essential that Christians understand this. Following Christ necessarily puts the Christian in opposition to the world, though ultimately, that opposition is for the world—we stand against the fallenness of the world, refusing to call it normal or healthy, in the hope that by God's grace it may be healed and restored. Those who think the Christian faith will bring them health, wealth, prosperity, and a respected place in the world either have a mistaken expectation or have compromised the Faith.

In the face of the world that inevitably brings the Christian tribulation, Christ calls the faithful to be of good cheer, to be confident and of good courage. He does not command this in a vacuum, however, but provides an excellent foundation for Christian good cheer in the world: "I have overcome the world." As Christ has overcome the world with all its deceptions, temptations, allurements, and tribulations and afflictions, He offers that same conquest to those who abide in Him. Though the world with its sin and darkness oppresses us, Christ has overcome it, and Christ in us overcomes it for us as well.

The Christian's focus in this life is not the world and its evils and injustices; rather, it is on Christ who has overcome the world for us. Knowing that, the Christian possesses sound reasons for being of good cheer all year around and not merely at Christmas. *Fr. Justin Frederick*

*For men young and old, and those who aspire to manhood: Kipling expresses the "Ideal Image"—the conception of what constitutes human excellence, goodness, and beauty.*

IF

*Rudyard Kipling*

If you can keep your head when all about you  
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,  
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,  
But make allowance for their doubting too;  
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,  
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,  
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,  
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;  
If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;  
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster  
And treat those two impostors just the same;  
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken  
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,  
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,  
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:

If you can make one heap of all your winnings  
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,  
And lose, and start again at your beginnings  
And never breathe a word about your loss;  
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew  
To serve your turn long after they are gone,  
And so hold on when there is nothing in you  
Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,  
Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,  
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,  
If all men count with you, but none too much;  
If you can fill the unforgiving minute  
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,  
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,  
And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!

### Upcoming Events 2022

30 September, Friday: All-Night Vigil, 9:00 p.m.  
16 October, Sunday: Octoberfest, 3:00 p.m.  
31 October, Monday: All Saints Party, 6:00 p.m.  
13 November, Sunday: 3:00 p.m. Thanksgiving Meal

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!